Siclone ...Clark

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

"THERE goes a fellow that walks like Siclone Clark," exclaimed Duck Middleton. Duck was sitting in the train master's office with a group of engineers. He was one of the blacklisted strikers and runs an engine now down on the Santa Fe. But at long intervals Duck goes back to revisit the scenes of his early triumphs. The men who surrounded him were once at deadly odds with Duck and his chums, though now the ancient enmities seem forgotten, and Duck, the once ferocious Duck, sits occasionally among the new men and gossips about early days on the West End.

"Do you remember Siclone, Reed?" asked Duck, calling to me in the private office.

"Remember him!" I echoed. "Did anybody who ever knew Siclone forget him?"

"I fired passenger for Siclone twenty years ago," resumed Duck. "He walked just like that fellow, only he was quicker. I reckon you fellows don't know what a snap you have here now," he continued, addressing the men around him. "Track fenced, ninety pound rails, steel bridges, stone culverts, slag ballast, skyscrapers—no wonder you get chances to haul such nobs as Lilliuokalani and Schley and Dewey and cut ninety miles an hour on tangents.

"When I was firing for Siclone the roadbed was just off the scrapers, the dumps were soft, pile bridges, paper culverts, fifty-six pound rails, not a fence west of Buffalo gap and the plains black with Texas steers. We never closed our cylinder cocks. The hiss of the steam frightened the cattle worse than the whistle, and we never knew when we were going to find a bunch of critters on the track.

"The first winter I came out was great for snow, and I was a tenderfoot. The cuts made good windbreaks, and whenever there was a norther they were chuck full of cattle. Every time a train plowed through the snow it made a path on the track. Whenever the steers wanted to move they would take the middle of the track single file and string out mile after mile. Talk about fast schedules and ninety miles an hour. You had to poke along with your cylinders spitting and just whistle and yell—sort of blow them off into the snowdrifts.

"One day Siclone and I were going west on 59, and we were late. For that matter, we were always late. Simpson, coming against us on 60, had caught a bunch of cattle in the rock cut just west of the Sappie and killed a couple. When we got there, there must have been a thousand head of steers mooning around the dead ones. Siclone—he used to be a cowboy, you know—Siclone said they were holding a wake. At any rate, they were still coming from every direction and as far as you could see.

"'Hold on, Siclone, and I'll chase them out,' I said.

"'That's the stuff, Duck,' says he. 'Go after them and see what you can

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do.' He looked kind of queer, but I never thought anything. I picked up a jack bar and started up the track.

"The first fellow I tackled looked lazy, but he started full quick when I hit him. Then he turned around to inspect me, and I noticed his horns were of the broad gauge variety. While I whacked another the first one put his head down and began to scrape and paw the ties. Then they all began to bellow at once. It looked smoky. I dropped the jack bar and started for the engine, and about fifty of them started for me.

"I never had an idea steers could run so. You could have played checkers on my heels all the way back. If Siclone hadn't come out and jollied them, I'd never got back in the world. I just jumped the pilot and went clear over against the boiler head. Siclone claimed I tried to climb the smokestack, but he was excited. Anyway, he stood out there with a shovel and kept the whole bunch off me. I thought they would kill him. But I never tried to chase range steers on foot again.

"In the spring we got the rains—not like you get now, but cloudbursts. The section men were good fellows, only sometimes we would get into a storm miles from a section gang and strike a place where we couldn't see a thing.

"Then Siclone would stop the train, take a bar and get down ahead and sound the roadbed. Many and many a washout he struck that way which would have wrecked our train and wound up our ball of yarn in a minute. Often and often Siclone would go into his division without a dry thread on him.

"Those were different days," mused the grizzled striker. "The old boys are scattered now all over this broad land. The strike did it, and you fellows have the snap. But what I wonder often and often is whether Siclone is really alive or not."

Siclone Clark was one of the two cowboys who helped Harvey Reynolds and Ed Banks save 59 at Griffin the night the coal train ran down from Ogallala. They were both taken into the service. Siclone after awhile went to wiping.

When Bucks asked his name, Siclone answered, "S. Clark."

"What's your full name?" asked Bucks.

"S. Clark."

"But what does S stand for?" persisted Bucks.

"Stands for Cyclone, I reckon. Don't it?" retorted the cowboy, with some annoyance.

It was not usual in those days on the plains to press a man too closely about his name. There might be reasons why it would not be esteemed courteous.

"I reckon it do," replied Bucks, dropping into Siclone's grammar. And without a quiver he registered the new man as Siclone Clark, and his checks always read that way. The name seemed to fit. He adopted it without any objection, and after everybody came to know him it fitted so well that Bucks was believed to have second sight when he named the harebrained fireman. He could get up a storm quicker than any man on the division and, if he felt so disposed, stop one quicker.

In spite of his eccentricities, which were many, and his headstrong way of doing some things, Siclone Clark was a good engineer and deserved a better fate than the one that befell him, though—who can tell?—it may have been just to his liking.

The strike was the worst thing that ever happened to Siclone. He was one of those big hearted, violent fellows who went into it loaded with enthusiasm. He had nothing to gain by it—at least, nothing to speak of. But the idea that somebody on the East End needed their help led men like Siclone in, and they thought it a cinch that the company would have to take them all back.

The consequence was that, when we staggered along without them, men like Siclone, easily aroused, naturally of violent passions and with no self restraint, stopped at nothing to cripple the service. And they looked on the men who took their places as entitled neither to liberty nor life.

When our new men began coming from the Reading to replace the strikers, every one wondered who would get Siclone Clark's engine, the 313. Siclone had gently sworn to kill the first man who took out the 313, bar nobody.

Whatever others thought of Siclone's vaporings, they counted for a good deal on the West End. Nobody wanted trouble with him.

Even Neighbor, who feared no man, sort of let the 313 lie in her stall as long as possible after the trouble began.

Nothing was said about it. Threats cannot be taken cognizance of officially. We were bombarded with threats all the time; they had long since ceased to move us. Yet Siclone's engine stayed in the roundhouse.

Then, after Foley and McTerza and Sinclair, came Fitzpatrick from the east. McTerza was put on the mails, and coming down one day on the White Flier he blew a cylinder head out of the 416.

Fitzpatrick was waiting to take her out when she came stumping in on one pair of drivers, for we were using engines worse than horseflesh then. But of course the 416 was put out. The only gig left in the house was the 313.

I imagine Neighbor felt the finger of fate in it. The mail had to go. The time had come for the 313. He ordered her fired.

"The man that ran this engine swore he would kill the man that took her out," said Neighbor, sort of incidentally, as Fitz stood by waiting for her to steam.

"I suppose that means me," said Fitzpatrick.

"I suppose it does."

"Whose engine is it?"

"Siclone Clark's."

Fitzpatrick shifted to the other leg.

"Did he say what I would be doing while this was going on?"

Something in Fitzpatrick's manner made Neighbor laugh. Other things crowded in and no more was said.

No more was thought, in fact. The 313 rolled as kindly for Fitzpatrick as for Siclone, and the new engineer, a quiet fellow like Foley, only a good bit heavier, went on and off her with never a word for anybody.

One day Fitzpatrick dropped into a barber shop to get shaved. In the next chair lay Siclone Clark. Siclone got through first and, stepping over to the table to get his hat, picked up Fitzpatrick's by mistake and walked out with it. He discovered his change just as Fitz got out of his chair. Siclone came back, replaced the hat on the table—it had Fitzpatrick's name pasted in the crown—took up his own hat and as Fitz reached for his looked at him.

Every one in the shop caught their breaths.

"Is your name Fitzpatrick?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mine is Clark."

Fitzpatrick put on his hat.

"You're running the 313, I believe?" continued Siclone.

"Yes, sir."

"That's my engine."

"I thought it belonged to the company."

"Maybe it does, but I've agreed to kill the man that takes her out before this trouble is settled," said Siclone amiably.

Fitzpatrick met him steadily. "If you'll let me know when it takes place, I'll try and be there."

"I don't jump on any man without fair warning. Any of the boys will tell you that," continued Siclone. "Maybe you didn't know my word was out?"

Fitzpatrick hesitated. "I'm not looking for trouble with any man," he replied guardedly, "but since you're disposed to be fair about notice it's only fair to you to say that I did know your word was out."

"Still you took her?"

"It was my orders."

"My word is out. The boys know it is good. I don't jump any man without fair warning. I know you now, Fitzpatrick, and the next time I see you look out." And without more ado Siclone walked out of the shop, greatly to the relief of the barber if not of Fitz.

Fitzpatrick may have wiped a little sweat from his face, but he said nothing, only walked down to the roundhouse and took out the 313 as usual for his run.

A week passed before the two men met again. One night Siclone, with a crowd of the strikers, ran into half a dozen of the new men, Fitzpatrick among them, and there was a riot. It was Siclone's time to carry out his intention, for Fitzpatrick would have scorned to try to get away. No tree ever breasted a tornado more sturdily than the Irish engineer withstood Siclone, but when Ed Banks got there with his wrecking crew and straightened things out Fitzpatrick was picked up for dead. That night Siclone disappeared.

Warrants were got out and searchers put after him, yet nobody could or would apprehend him. It was generally understood that the sudden disappearance was one of Siclone's freaks. If the ex-cowboy had so determined he would not have hidden to keep out of anybody's way. I have sometimes pondered whether shame hadn't something to do with it. His tremendous physical strength was fit for so much better things than beating other men that maybe he himself sort of realized it after the storm had passed.

Down east of the depot grounds at McCloud stands or stood a great barnlike hotel, built in boom days and long a favorite resting place for invalids and travelers en route to California by easy stages. It was nicknamed the barracks. Many railroad men boarded there, and the new engineers liked it because it was close to the roundhouse and away from the strikers.

Fitzpatrick, without a whine or a complaint, was put to bed in the barracks, and Holmes Kay, one of the staff surgeons, was given charge of the case. A trained nurse was provided besides. Nobody thought the injured man would live. But after every care was given him we turned our attention to the troublesome task of operating the road.

The 313, whether it happened so or whether Neighbor thought it well to drop the disputed machine temporarily, was not taken out again for three weeks. She was looked on as a hoodoo, and nobody wanted her. Foley refused point plank one day to take her, claiming that he had troubles of his own. Then one day something happened to McTerza's engine. We were stranded for a locomotive, and the 313 was brought out for McTerza. He didn't like it a bit.

Meantime nothing had been seen or heard of Siclone. That, in fact, was the reason Neighbor urged for using his engine, but it seemed as if every time the 313 went out it brought out Siclone, not to speak of worse things.

That morning about 3 o'clock the unlucky engine was coupled on to the White Flier. The night boy at the barracks always got up a hot lunch for the incoming and outgoing crews on the mail run, and that morning when he was through he forgot to turn off the lamp under his coffee tank. It overheated the counter, and in a few minutes the woodwork was ablaze. If the frightened boy had emptied the coffee on the counter he could have put the fire out, but instead he ran out to give the alarm and started upstairs to arouse the guests.

There were at least fifty people asleep in the house, traveling and railway men. Being a modern building, it was a quick prey, and in an incredibly short time the flames were leaping through the second story windows.

When I got down men were jumping in every direction from the burning hotel. Railroaders swarmed around, busy with schemes for getting the people out, for none is more quick witted in time of panic. Short as the opportunity was, there were many pretty rescues, until the flames, shooting up, cut off the stairs and left the helpers nothing for it but to stand and watch the destruction of the long, rambling building. Half a dozen of us looked from the dispatchers' offices in the second story of the depot. We had agreed that the people were all out when Foley below gave a cry and pointed to the south gable. Away up under the eaves at the third story window we saw a face. It was Fitzpatrick.

Everybody had forgotten Fitzpatrick and his nurse. Behind, as the flames lighted the opening, we could see the nurse struggling to get him to the window. It was plain that the engineer was in no condition to help himself. The two men were in deadly peril. A great cry went up.

The crowd swarmed like ants around to the south end. A dozen men called for ladders, but there were no ladders. They called for volunteers to go in after the two men, but the stairs were long since a furnace. There were men in plenty to take any kind of chance, however slight, but no chance offered.

The nurse ran to and from the window, seeking a loophole for escape. Fitzpatrick dragged himself higher on the casement to get out of the smoke which rolled over him in choking bursts and looked down on the crowd. They begged him to jump—held out their arms frantically. The two men, again side by side, waved a hand. It looked like a farewell. There was no calling from them, no appeal. The nurse would not desert his charge, and we saw it all.

Suddenly there was a cry below keener than the confused shouting of the crowd, and one running forward parted the men at the front and, clearing the fence, jumped into the yard under the burning gable.

Before people recognized him a lariat was swinging over his head. It was Siclone Clark. The rope left his arm

Hand over hand Siclone Clark crept up.

like a slungshot and flew straight at Fitzpatrick. Not seeing or confused, he missed it, and the rope, with a groan from the crowd, settled back. The agile cowboy caught it again into a loop and shot it upward, that time fairly over Fitzpatrick's head.

"Make fast!" roared Siclone. Fitzpatrick shouted back, and the two men above drew taut. Hand over hand Siclone Clark crept up, like a monkey, bracing his feet against the smoking clapboards, edging away from the vomiting windows, swinging on the single strand of horsehair and followed by a hundred prayers unsaid.

Men who didn't know what tears were tried to cry out to keep the choking from their throats. It seemed an age before he covered the last five feet and the men above caught frantically at his hands.

Drawing himself over the casement, he was lost with them a moment. Then from behind a burst of smoke they saw him rigging a maverick saddle on Fitzpatrick, saw Fitzpatrick lifted by Clark and the nurse over the sill, lowered like a wooden tie, whirling and swinging, down into twenty arms below. Before the trainmen had got the engineer loose the nurse, following, slid like a cat down the incline, but not an instant too soon. A tongue of flame lit the gable from below and licked the horsehair up into a curling, frizzling thread, and Siclone stood alone in the upper casement.

It seemed for the moment he stood there the crowd would go mad. The shock and the shouting seemed to confuse him. It may have been the hot air took his breath. They yelled to him to jump, but he swayed uncertainly. Once, an instant after that, he was seen to look down; then he drew back from the casement. I never saw him again.

The flames wrapped the building in a yellow fury. By daylight the big barracks were a smoldering pile of ruins. So little water was thrown that it was nearly nightfall before we could get into the wreck. The tragedy had blotted out the feud between the strikers and the new men. Side by side they worked, as side by side Siclone and Fitzpatrick had stood in the morning, striving to uncover the mystery of the missing man. Next day twice as many men were in the ruins.

Fitzpatrick while we were searching called continually for Siclone Clark. We didn't tell him the truth. Indeed, we didn't know it, nor do we yet know it. Every brace, every beam, every brick, was taken from the charred pile, every foot of cinders, every handful of ashes sifted, but of a human being the searchers found never a trace, not a bone, not a key, not a knife, not a button which could be identified as his. Like the smoke which swallowed him up, he had disappeared completely and forever.

Is he alive? I cannot tell.

But this I know:

Years afterward Sidney Blair, head of our engineering department, was running a line, looking then, as we are looking yet, for a coast outlet.

He took only a flying camp with him, traveling in the lightest kind of order, camping often with the cattlemen he ran across.

One night away down in the Panhandle they fell in with an outfit driving a bunch of steers up the Yellow Grass trail. Blair noted that the foreman was a character—a man of few words, but of great muscular strength, and, moreover, frightfully scarred.

He was silent and inclined to be morose at first, but after he learned Blair was from McCloud he unbent a bit and after a time began asking questions which indicated a surprising familiarity with the northern country and with our road. In particular, this man asked what had become of Bucks and, when told what a big railroad man he had grown, asserted, with a sudden bitterness and without in any way leading up to it, that with Bucks on the West End there never would have been a strike.

Sitting at their campfire while their crews mingled, Blair noticed in the flicker of the blaze how seamed the throat and breast of the cattleman were. Even his sinewy forearms were drawn out of shape. He asked, too, whether Blair recollected the night the barracks burned, but Blair at that time was east of the river and so explained, though he related to the cowboy incidents of the fire which he had heard among others the story of Fitzpatrick and Siclone Clark.

"And Fitzpatrick is alive, and Siclone is dead," said Blair in conclusion. But the cowboy disputed him.

"You mean Clark is alive and Fitzpatrick is dead," said he.

"No," contended Sidney, "Fitzpatrick is running an engine up there now. I saw him within three months." But the cowboy was loath to conviction.

Next morning their trails forked. The foreman seemed disinclined to part from the surveyors, and while the bunch was starting he rode a long way with Blair, talking in a random way. Then, suddenly wheeling, he waved a goodby with his heavy Stetson and, galloping hard, was soon lost to the north in the ruts of the Yellow Grass.

When Blair came in he told Neighbor and me about it. Blair had never seen Siclone Clark and so was no judge as to his identity, but Neighbor believes yet that Blair camped that night way down in the Panhandle with no other than the cowboy engineer.

Once again, that only two years ago, something came back to us.

Holmes Kay, one of our staff of surgeons, the man, in fact, who took care of Fitzpatrick, enlisted in Illinois and went with the First to Cuba. They got in front of Santiago just after the hard fighting of July 1, and Holmes was detailed for hospital work among Roosevelt's men, who had suffered severely the day before.

One of the wounded, a sergeant, had sustained a gunshot wound in the jaw and in the confusion had received scant attention. Kay took hold of him. He was a cowboy, like most of the rough riders, and after his jaw was dressed Kay made some remark about the hot fire they had been through before the blockhouse.

"I'd been through a hotter before I ever saw Cuba," answered the rough rider as well as he could through his bandages. The remark directed Kay's attention to the condition of his breast and neck, which were a mass of scars.

"Where are you from?" asked Holmes.

"Everywhere."

"Where did you get burned that way?"

"Out on the plains."

"How?"

But the poor fellow went off into a delirium and to the surgeon's amazement began repeating train orders. Kay was paralyzed at the way he talked our lingo—and a cowboy. When he left the wounded man for the night he resolved to question him more closely the next day, but the next day orders came to rejoin his regiment at the trenches. The surrender shifted things about, and Kay, though he made repeated inquiry, never saw the man again.

Neighbor when he heard the story was only confirmed in his belief that the rough rider was Siclone Clark. I give you the tales as they came to me and for what you may make of them.

I myself believe that if Siclone Clark is still alive he will one day yet come back to where he was best known and, in spite of his faults, best liked. They talk of him out there as they do of old man Sankey.

I say I believe if he lives he will one day come back. The day he does will be a great day in McCloud. On that day Fitzpatrick will have to take down the little tablet which he placed in the brick facade of the hotel which now stands on the site of the old barracks, for as that tablet now stands it is sacred to the memory of Siclone Clark.

The Ostrich's Mistake.

A trained ostrich recently disconcerted its exhibitor at a music hall by continually endeavoring to break away from all restraint and to climb over the footlights into the orchestra.

The widely advertised act came to a sudden end, and the professor emerged from behind the curtain and apologized for the actions of his pet in about these words:

"Lydies and Gentlemen—Hi ham very sorry to disappoint you this hevening. We are compelled to cease our hengagement until the management hengages a new horchestra leader.

"The one at present hemployed 'ere 'as no 'air on top of 'is 'ead, and my bird takes it for a hegg."—Tit Bits.